

## Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9735

INFO AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

AMEMBASSY OTTAWA

AMCONSUL ASMARA

USUN NEW YORK 1561

C O N F I D E N T I A L ADDIS ABABA 7328

EXDIS

E.O.11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS CASC ET

SUBJ: TENNECO FIVE

REF: (A) STATE 133217; (B) STATE 136125

1. CANADIAN AMBASSADOR REYNOLDS, UNDP REPRESENTATIVE PHILLIPS AND I HAD LENGTHY DISCUSSION WITH FONMIN ZEWDE EVENING JUNE 25 ON THIS SUBJECT, MUCH OF TIME BEING DEVOTED TO BRIEFING HIM ON RECENT DEVELOPMENTS.

2. AMBASSADOR REYNOLDS BEGAN WITH OBSERVATIONS QUITE SIMILAR TO PARA 3 OF REFTEL A. HE ADDED THAT TENNECO'S GO-BETWEEN WAS WORRIED THAT ONGOING TROOP MOVEMENTS, LOCATION OF WHICH WAS UNCLEAR TO REYNOLDS, MIGHT INTERFERE WITH IMPENDING RELEASE OF WEDERFORT. ZEWDE SAID HE WOULD LOOK INTO TROOP MOVEMENTS AND ENDEAVOR MAKE SURE NOTHING UNUSUAL WOULD OCCUR WHICH MIGHT ALARM ELF.

3. I THEN MADE COMMENTS PER PARA 3 OF REFTEL A. WHILE INDICATING THAT TENNECO IS PREPARED CONTINUE ITS NEGOTIATIONS WITH IEF, I STRESSED THAT A NEW SITUATION WILL CONFRONT US WHEN WEDERFORT IS RELEASED BECAUSE (A) PUBLICITY IN US ATTENDING WEDERFORT'S RELEASE WILL STIMULATE STRONG CONGRESSIONAL AND PUBLIC INTEREST IN IMMEDIATE RELEASE REMAINING

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SIONAL AND PUBLIC INTEREST IN IMMEDIATE RELEASE REMAINING

CAPTIVES, AND (B) ELF WILL FEEL NEXT MOVE IS UP TO IEG IN VIEW ITS EARLIER STATEMENTS THAT RELEASE OF FIVE IEG-HELD PRISONERS MUST FOLLOW RELEASE OF MRS. DORTZBACH AND WEDERFORT. LATER IN CONVERSATION I EXPRESSED PERSONAL SURPRISE THAT IEG HAD NOT THUS FAR EVEN FORMULATED A COUNTER-PROPOSAL TO ELF DEMAND FOR RELEASE OF FIVE PRISONERS.

4. PHILLIPS THEN EXPRESSED CONCERN THT FAILURE EFFECT RELEASE OF UNDP OFFICIAL IN TENNECO GROUP COULD ADVERSELY AFFECT CERTAIN UNDP PROGRAMS IN ETHIOPIA.

5. ZEWDE RESPONDED THAT HE FULLY AGREES RELEASE OF TENNECO 5 IS PRIMARILY RESPONSIBILITY OF IEG. WITH HIS CHARACTERISTIC CANDOR, HE SAID THAT, WHILE HE HAD NOT YET DISCUSSED CURRENT STATUS OF CASE WITH HIS COLLEAGUES, HE THOUGHT IT WOULD BE REASONABLE TO RELEASE SOME PRISONERS. ONLY HALF FACETIOUSLY HE COMMENTED THAT SECURITY SITUATION NOW SO BAD IN ERITREA, ALTHOUGH MANY IEG OFFICIALS REFUSE TO ADMIT IT, THAT ELF MIGHT FREE THESE FIVE PRISONERS BY ITS OWN ACTIONS IF IEG DOES NOT DO SO. (HE ALSO OBSERVED THAT HE HAS THOUGHT FOR YEARS THAT IEG SHOULD NEGOTIATE WITH ELF AND IS NOW ARGUING IN CABINET MEETINGS FOR THIS COURSE OF ACTION.) HOWEVER, HE WILL NEED TO CONSULT WITHIN IEG ON THIS PROBLEM AND THEN RESUME DISCUSSIONS WITH US AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. HE SPECULATED THAT IT MIGHT BE PARTICULARLY DIFFICULT FOR ARMY, VIEWS OF WHICH ARE SO IMPORTANT THESE DAYS, TO ACCEPT RELEASE FO PRISONERS WHO HAD BEEN FIGHTING AGAINST IT.

6. ZEWDE POINTED OUT THAT GOVGEN OF ERITREA HAD BEEN WILLING ENTER INTO NEGOTIATIONS WITH ELF WEEKS AGO BUT THAT HE UNDERSTOOD TENNECO HAD PREFERRED TO CONDUCT NEGOTIATIONS ITSELF. HENCE IEG COULD NOT BE BLAMED FOR LACK OF SUCCESS TO DATE. I ASSURED HIM THAT HIS UNDERSTANDING OF TENNECO'S PREFERENCE HAD BEEN CORRECT AND THAT USG UNDERSTOOD EARLIER NON-PARTICIPATION OF IEG IN NEGOTIATING EFFORT, BUT EMPHASIZED THAT SITUATION IS QUITE DIFFERENT NOW THAT TENNECO MUST RESPOND TO DEMAND FOR RELEASE OF IEG-HELD PRISONERS.

7. ZEWDE OBSERVED THAT GOVGEN WOULD PROBABLY PREFER NEGOTIATION THROUGH MORGHANI RATHER THAN THROUGH THE "ALTERNATIVE  
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CHANNEL" (REGARDING IDENTITY OF WHICH HE DID NOT INQUIRE). REYNOLDS AND I SPOKE AT CONSIDERABLE LENGTH SO THAT HE WOULD SEE WHY WE ALL HAVE MORE CONFIDENCE IN ALTERNATIVE CHANNEL THAN IN MORGHANI. CONFLICTING ATTITUDES OF "REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL" AND "EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE" TOWARDS NURSE'S RELEASE WERE DISCUSSED IN DETAIL.

8. AT END MEETING I HAVE ZEWDE THE NEW INFORMATION REGARDING

TWO OF FIVE PRISONERS WHOSE RELEASE SOUGHT BY ZEIN (KHARTOUM 1506).

9. COMMENT. STATE 136125 JUST RECEIVED. REYNOLD'S COMMENTS AND MINE COVERED PROBLEM OF POSSIBLE TROOP MOVEMENTS WHICH COULD EITHER SLOW DOWN WEDERFORT'S RELEASE OR ENDANGER LIVES OF CAPTIVES. HOWEVER IT APPEARS DOUBTFUL THAT IEG WILL DO MUCH ABOUT FREEZING TROOP MOVEMENTS TEMPORARILY UNLESS IT KNOWS JUST WHAT AREA IS INVOLVED.

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